

# CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

FEBRUARY 1985

10th year of publication

Vol. 10 #1.

98



The Goldfields Waxflower, *Eriostemon verrucosus*

President: Mr John Dare Ph. 76 4227  
Secretary: Mrs Beri Perry Ph. 73 4240

Meetings: Held on the second Friday of each month,  
at the Castlemaine High School, Lawson Parade  
commencing at 8 p.m. Visitors are welcome.

Excursions: Usually held on the second Saturday following;  
Unless otherwise stated, departure is at  
1.30 p.m. from outside the S.E.C. building,  
Mostyn St.



## Editorial

Welcome again to all avid readers in 1985. I mention the date to try to get used to it, having just got myself out of the habit of writing 1983.

Once again to the Annual Meeting where we look forward to a fresh infusion of ideas and enthusiasm. Please don't think that it is necessary to be an expert in Natural History to be a committee member. After all, it is ideas on how the club should be run which are needed.

Obviously a new editor is urgently required..

What a quiet period it has been in the garden. Hardly even a Wattle-bird to disturb the tranquility. Well, only a few. The usual baskbirds of course, especially during January when the mulberries are ripe. There is a constant flow of traffic flying away from the tree, fruit in beak, ready to be dropped on verandah or dripped on the washing. The Silvereyes enjoy them too. On quiet peaceful mornings one may hear a sort of crunching sound coming from the pine trees on the nature strip. One may find, if one looks in the right place, maybe one to several White Cockatoos steadily demolishing the pine cones for their seeds. Fortunately they have not taken to screeching outside our bedroom window as they tend to do at other times of the year. One is more likely at the moment to waken to the sound of a "peep-peep" coming from the oak tree. That announces the presence of a group of Crimson Rosellas which are visiting on a regular basis at present.

Rather a disappointment though is our Eucalyptus *froggattii* which at present is covered in bloom. Like the *E. viridis* last year which bloomed a little later, there is hardly a bird to be seen on it. My wife has been saying that the tree is becoming too big and is shading her favourite sunning spot on the verandah, while I have been pointing out that when all the buds burst it will be full of Honeyeaters. Well! The buds have burst, the honey is flowing, the sun is there for sunning, BUT WHERE ARE THE HONEYEATERS ? Not a one to be seen. There were some Yellow-winged checking it out before it bloomed, but they have not been back since. The tree is covered in bees and other insects and some Silvereyes but no Honeyeaters. It must be flowing with honey to judge by the activity of the bees on the blossoms, and none of them is carrying any pollen, all of their pollen baskets on their legs are empty.



At this stage I took a break, went for a walk outside to move the sprinkler and met a lady Rufous Whistler on the ground wrestling with what looked like a large grasshopper. Next moment three Crimson Rosellas flew into the oak tree. One was eating something which I thought might be one of the acorns which are rather small, but no! It was clutching a large acorn which it must have obtained from a different sort of oak tree. While looking up at the oak tree I noticed some Spine-tailed Swifts flying over the house, or at least I thought they were. To check up I dashed inside to fetch the binoculars, but found on my return that most had disappeared. One or two were still swooping around so I followed them through the glass as they headed away to the north-west. Next moment the sky in that direction was full of Swifts whirling about. Barely visible to the naked eye, they were swirling about, appearing to rise on an air current. Perhaps they were catching

(Contd. p.7)

STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS & EXPENDITURE  
as at 10-12-84

Receipts

Credit balance 1-1-84	59-10
Subscriptions	180-00
Donations	5-00
Raffles	10-00
Sale newsletter	0-47
Supper	25-27
Bank interest	2-33

Expenditure

Receipt books	1-00
Name tabs	2-10
Safety pins	1-08
Printing newsletter	145-80
Room hire	16-00
Tea & biscuits	9-68
Bank charges	3-15
Affiliation	21-00
Postage	0-40
Petty cash	10-00
Registration	60-00
Travel ex. Speaker	10-00
Balance	2-26

282-47

282-47

Note: Sale of Newsletter increased by \$2-77 collected from the Ed. Centre in late December. Also the last raffle, \$8-80 is not included in the above statement.  
Bank balance \$1-79. Cash in hand 47c. as per statement balance \$2-26.



VICTORIAN FIELD NATURALIST CLUBS ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL LABOUR DAY GET-TOGETHER

SATURDAY MARCH 9th to MONDAY MARCH 11th 1985

MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Host Club - Peninsula Field Naturalists Club

(Hon Secretary - Mrs Alison Walker

637 Nepean Hwy, Frankston 3199

Ph. 787 7359)

Saturday March 9th 1985

1.30 p.m. Meet at Adam Clarke Village  
Golf Links Rd., Baxter

For briefing and excursion to Moorooduc Quarry  
and Sweetwater Reserve.

7 p.m. Amenities Hall, Adam Clarke Village  
Annual General Meeting and Election of Officers  
bearers. (Nomination for President and Secretary  
to be in hands of Hon Secretary/Treasurer by  
March 4th 1985

7.45 p.m. Social and slides of Mornington Peninsula -Supper

Sunday March 10th 1985

9 a.m. Leave Adam Clarke Village for Flinders - Beach  
walk, Coastal Geology, etc.

10.30 a.m. Leave Flinders for parking area, Bushrangers  
Bay Track. (Boneo Road).  
The more energetic can walk along the cliff to  
Cape Schanck Reserve.  
Others may visit HIGHFIELD National Park.

2.p.m. Bus leaves to pick-up walkers at Cape Schanck  
and returns to PINES PICNIC AREA, coastal walks,  
afternoon tea.

2.30-4.30 p.m. Return via Arthurs Seat.

7.45 p.m. Amenities Building, Adam Clarke Village.  
Mr J. Weir, Marine Biologist, will give a talk.



All Club Reports - please have these ready.  
Supper.

Monday March 11th 1985 (Labour Day Holiday)

9 a.m. Leave Adam Clarke Village for Blake Street  
Shoreham, opposite Camp Buxton.  
Few hundred yards walk to beach for reefing.  
(Low tide 9 a.m.)  
Swimming and Lunch

Farewells

A bus will leave Melbourne 9 a.m. Saturday Mar  
9th from Gas and Fuel, Flinders Street.

Coach passengers can stay at Frankston Beach  
9 Beach St. Frankston. Cost of coach and Motel  
\$85. Contact Marie Allender, Excursion Secy  
Ph. 527 2749

On site caravans and camping area available  
Robinsons Rd Caravan Park Near village.  
Make own arrangements.

BIRDING AT HOME AND INTERSTATE

by Rita Mills

On the way back from the West we decided to stay at the  
little holiday/fishing village of Smokey Bay, instead of  
Ceduna, 20 miles to the North-west. We'd called in on the  
over and liked the look of the place. It's in the 250 mm  
rainfall zone, and the temperature often reaches 40°C in  
Summer, but while we were there in October it was very  
pleasant, with a cool wind off the sea.

We'd only thought of staying overnight, but after a walk  
down the long jetty to see the birds - which turned out to  
be mainly feral pigeons, seagulls and a pelican - on the  
piles of the old jetty, and after realising how tired we  
of driving from the Stirlings in only three days, we decided  
to stay another day. It was a good decision because on a  
walk along the beach the next day (which started as a short stroll  
and finished as a 2½ hour walk!), we saw lots of birds,  
including a Pacific Gull, a Crested Tern standing among a  
group of Silver Gulls, Fairy Terns, which rose in the air  
in front of us and held still before suddenly darting off, s



I think, Mongolian Dotterels -- could have been double-banded I'm not sure, but they were quite small - which trotted along the sand ahead of us, feeding as they went, and suddenly taking off, seeming to triple their numbers as they went. They would skim just above the surface of the waves like a gossamer cloud, sounds very poetic, but that describes it fairly well.



There were also a number of Pied Oyster Catchers which always managed to keep out of good camera range.

We walked up to a small headland where there were a few mangroves, lots of little crabs, fish and shells to find in the shallow water. After we got back we had a late lunch and rested, but got itchy feet again and decided to go the other way. There was quite a cold wind blowing by this time, and when we got around the headland not far from the jetty we found we were above a mudflat with mangroves and a few low "islands" of coarse grass shrubs and young mangroves where many birds were sheltering. Ones that I can remember were Silver Gulls, an immature Pacific Gull, Red-capped Dotterels, the little Dotterels we'd seen earlier, Sooty and Pied Oyster-Catchers and some I wasn't too sure of at all, although I think the ones sheltering behind tussocks were Golden Plovers. There were also Pelicans and pair of Nankeen Kestrels

We had a couple of very pleasant interludes birdwatching since then. Our son-in-law took me out to their special spot in the bush at Moyston and we watched young White-browed and Dusky Woodswallows learning to fly and being fed. We also saw a Button Quail, a couple of flocks of Sitellas and a long-legged, slim brown bird which baffled us for a while, but which we finally decided was a Rufous Song Lark.

The other occasion was in our own back yard in mid January. I had the pleasure of watching a couple of young Yellow-faced Honeyeaters (and photographing them) from just a few feet away, while they happily preened, waited for Mum to bring a feed, and generally ignored me. Mum was a little more wary, and would feed them till I was out of the way.

We have a lot of birds here, including four varieties of Thornbills and lots of Honeyeaters but seldom have I had such a lovely opportunity to see and photograph them.



insects rising above a fire, although there did not appear to be any smoke.

All this was intended to show that things often pop up just when least expected. Good watching in 1985

### PECULIAR BEHAVIOUR OF SKINKS.

by G. Broadway

While out surveying my garden in the late afternoon recently my attention was suddenly drawn to a flurry of activity on the ground among the bushes. Something white it seemed which was reflecting the late afternoon sun. Closer inspection revealed that the light was being reflected from the undersurface of a couple of skinks.

How odd, I thought, that skinks would draw attention to themselves in this way with so many birds about. However it seemed that the displays of the underparts had little choice in the matter, as one at least was firmly gripped in the jaws of another skink, just below one of its forelegs. It seemed at first that several skinks were fighting to get a grip of the unfortunate, which was lying on its back and displaying little sign of life. Are they then cannibals? I wondered as they appeared to struggle for a share in the spoils.

As I watched, it became obvious that, of the six skinks, some were there purely as spectators. They took no part in the struggle but darted or strolled about, particularly on and over the combatants. So the group resolved itself into 6 animals, 3 combatants, and three spectators.

It appeared to me that a fight to the death had already occurred as one participant lay very still. However the opportunity to photograph was too good to miss so I hastened for my camera. On my return and approach to within camera range however, the spectators, like schoolboys



fled the scene leaving only the protagonists with jaws locked around each other, or at least two were busily biting the third, supposedly dead one. However, the approach of the camera was too much. Suddenly the two biters released their grips and fled the scene leaving only the one, which, as soon as it was released quickly righted itself, took a deep breath and fled also leaving the battleground bare, or the ring empty.

Were they playing, or was it more serious. Or more sinister perhaps? After all the odds were not entirely even. Two against one, and spectators walking all over the top into the bargain. Was it not rather dangerous to play like that in the open, apparently oblivious to the approach of a possible predator. Oblivious anyway until the predator was within pouncing distance. As well for them that cameras don't pounce.

### Club Program 1985

#### Meetings:

FRiday' February 8: Wanderings in the West  
Rita Mills

Friday, March 8: Local Geology. Some Geological Features of the Castlemaine District.

#### Excursions:

It is club policy to cancel excursions if a Total Fire Ban is proclaimed.

Saturday, February 9, Jim Crow Range; Leader Jack Dare.  
Leave S.E.C. building 1.30 sharp, or 1.45 at the Guildford Store.

Saturday, March 9. Local Geology Leader E.P.  
Leave S.E.C. at 1.30

Saturday, April 13. Yandoit - Cox property  
Leader; Kaye Turner. S.E.C. at 1.30

Saturday, May 11. Devils Kitchen  
Note; leave S.E.C. at 10-a.m.

August; W.V.F.N.C.A.

September; all day excursion to Melville Caves

October; W.V.F.N.C.A.

Sunday October 20; Whipstick with Maryborough F.N.C.